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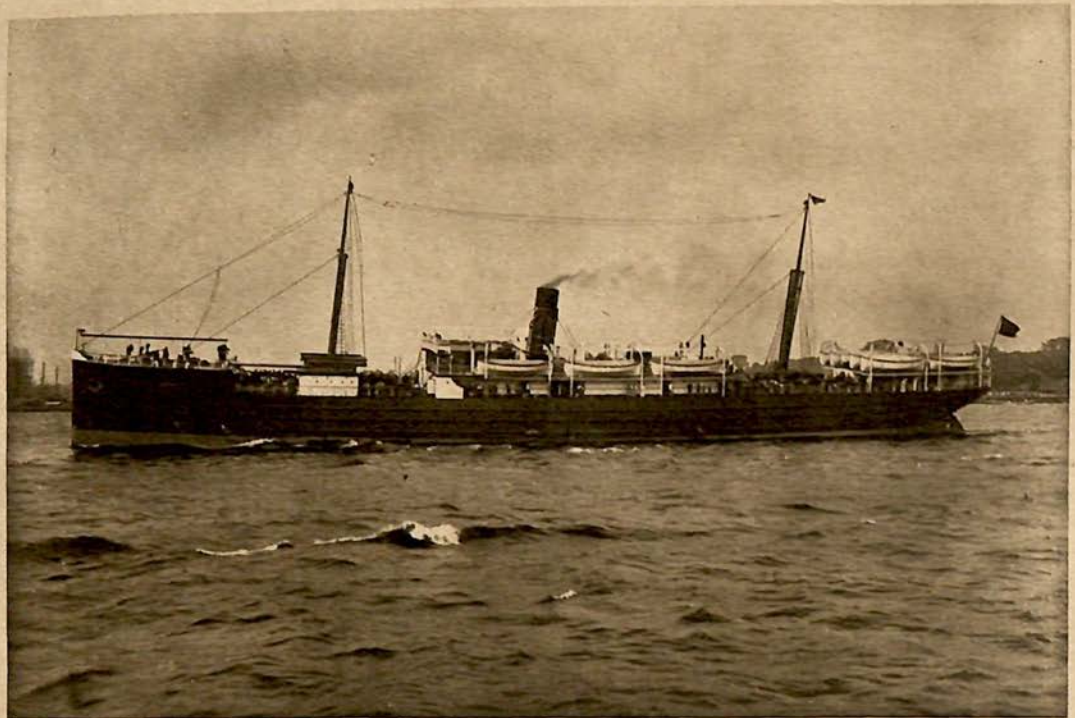
THE BURNING OF THE "VOLTURNO"



S.S. VOLTURNO

THE BURNING OF THE "VOLTURNO"

Arthur Spurgeon

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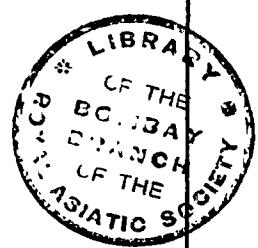
With Photogravure and
Twenty Other Plates



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Author's Note

I WISH to tender my special thanks to Captain Barr, of the *Carmania*, to Mr. J. C. Humphreys (Purser) and Mr. A. C. Mackenzie (Surgeon) for their sympathetic co-operation which enabled me to send promptly my first aerograms to the British newspapers through the Press Association; to Captain Inch for much valuable information now published for the first time, and to Messrs. H. Windfeld-Hansen, C. F. Hart, John Small, M.A., LL.B., Jonathan W. Stott and T. Watson, passengers on the *Carmania*, for placing their films at my disposal for the purpose of illustrating this little volume.

The entire profits of the book will be handed to Captain Inch, with the full

approval of the Uranium Steamship Company, to be distributed at his discretion as supplementary to the Relief Fund opened at Rotterdam. A remittance has already been sent to Captain Inch for the purpose of assisting special cases of hardship and suffering arising out of this great disaster of the sea.

LA BELLE SAUVAGE, LONDON,
December, 1913

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The blocks for these plates have been kindly provided by Messrs. André & Sleigh, Ltd., the well-known Photo-Engravers of Bushey.

Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell—
  Then shriek'd the timid, and stood still the brave—
Then some leap'd overboard with dreadful yell,
  As eager to anticipate their grave;
And the sea yawn'd around her like a hell.

BYRON.

THE BURNING OF THE "VOLTURNO"

"British steamer 'Volturno,' from Rotterdam for New York, abandoned on fire, October 10, *latitude* 48.25 *north, longitude* 34.33 *west."*

SUCH was the message to Lloyd's which reached London on Saturday, October 11th, 1913, recording one of the most appalling tragedies that has yet taken place in the history of navigation. It was followed shortly afterwards by a brief aerogram from Captain Barr, of the Cunard Liner *Carmania*, who recounted how he received a wireless call at sea to go to the assistance of the *Volturno*, on fire 78 miles away, with 657 souls on

How the World Heard

board; and in the message he reported that the following vessels had rushed to the help of the burning vessel:—

Carmania	*Rappahannock*
Seydlitz	*Czar*
Grösser Kurfürst	*Narragansett*
La Touraine	*Devonian*
Minneapolis	*Kroonland*

I happened to be a passenger on the first-named vessel, and earlier in the week I had agreed to edit the daily newspaper published on the ship. This will explain why it came about that I wrote the first description which appeared in print of this great drama of the sea. It also gives the reason why my fellow-passengers should have asked me to put the story into permanent form. Fortunately I have been able to enlist the good offices of Captain Frank Inch, the heroic Commander of the *Volturno*,

and the narrative, therefore, covers the tragedy from the point of view both of spectator and chief actor. Never before has the spectacle been witnessed of so many giants of the ocean assembled round a burning vessel in mid-Atlantic, yet powerless to help her, and probably so long as ships go down into deep waters such a drama will never be witnessed again.

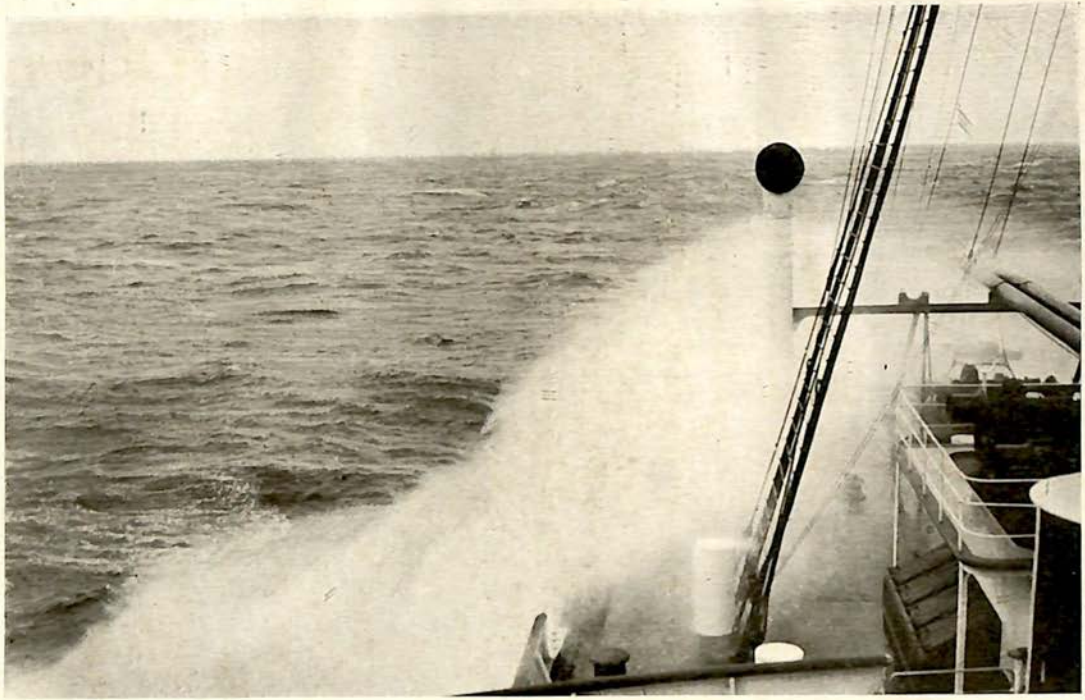
The Call—and the Answer

On Thursday morning, October 9th, I was informed by one of the officers that a wireless call had been received from the steamship *Volturno* on fire about 78 miles distant. A wild storm was raging, and terrific beam seas were running which we thought would make the work of rescue very difficult, but we never imagined that it would prove altogether impossible. The engineers crowded on every ounce of steam, and the *Carmania* made a record for such bad

weather, the 78 miles being covered in just under four hours. Long before the ship came into view we saw clouds of smoke darkening the horizon, and when we came nearer we realised that the fire had obtained complete mastery, the doom of the vessel being sealed beyond all question.

It was about noon, and for hours the fire had been burning furiously. When and how it started no one knows. The *Volturno* belonged to the Uranium Steamship Company, and left Rotterdam the week previously with 564 passengers and a crew of 93 for Halifax and New York. The vessel carried a general cargo, consisting of chemicals, oils, rags, peat moss, straw bottle covers and mats, and large quantities of wine and spirits—all highly inflammable goods, and providing fuel for the fire which was to occasion such a thrilling tragedy. The sug-

How the Fire Started



The *Carmania* rushing to the rescue

gestion that the fire was started by a lighted cigarette falling into the hold on the morning of the disaster cannot seriously be entertained, as it was evident it had been smouldering for a long time previous to its discovery. It may have been caused by spontaneous combustion among the rags which might have been placed on board in a damp or oily condition. Whether this be so or not, it is a fact that within a few minutes of its discovery the hold was blazing madly.

Captain Inch was in his room when the Chief Officer reported that smoke was coming out of No. 1 hatch. He ordered the Chief Officer to slow the ship down, to get all hands to stations, but not to tell the passengers what had happened. The Chief Officer, however, told him that the passengers knew already. The Officer then left to carry out his instructions, and before Captain Inch

S
O
S

could dress, a second message came that the ship was in flames forward. He at once rushed on to the deck, and, realising the danger, ordered the Marconi operator to send out the S O S call. At the top of the companion-way he met a Quartermaster, whose face was black and bleeding, and whose clothes were torn and begrimed.

"Where have you come from?" asked the Captain.

"Out of the fo'c'sle, and there are four burnt to death," he answered in a dazed manner.

This was Death's first toll. Although the alarm had been given only five minutes before, this body of fire had sprung up and encompassed five of the men of the watch below. Of those five only the Quartermaster came out alive. The other four were found later, just charred remnants of

human form, hardly recognisable as having once been men.

Within five or six minutes after the Captain came on deck the flames were reaching back to the bridge, and the life-rafts stowed alongside the foremast were on fire.

Life-belts were served to the passengers, and, whilst this was being done, three explosions took place, the second blowing the compasses out of the binnacle and disabling the steering-gear and engine-room telegraph. Had there been a fourth, there is no doubt, in the opinion of Captain Inch, that the vessel must have foundered.

Fighting the Fire

The Officers and crew set to work at once to grapple with the fire. They got out the hose, pumped steam into the holds, and for twenty-four hours played upon the flames. Chemical extinguishers were available, but were not used,

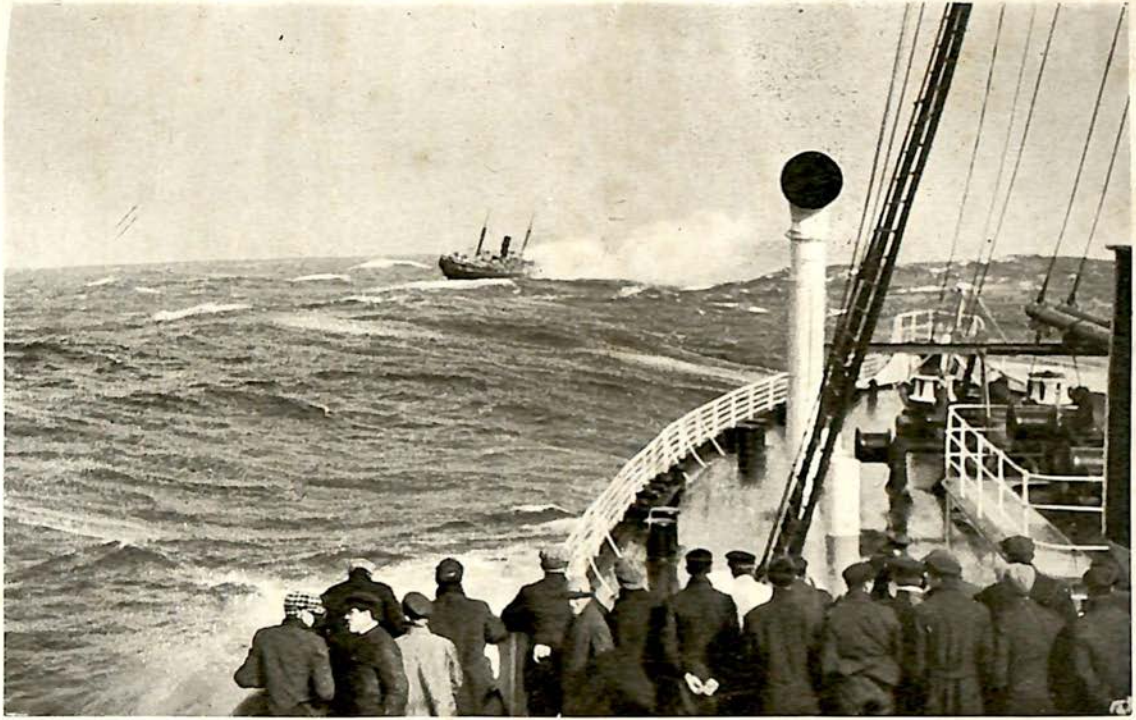
as they could be of no assistance. When Captain Inch saw what a mastery the fire had obtained he did not think the *Volturno* could last an hour. With the hatches gone, steam, which is very effective provided the compartments can be made air-tight, was streaming out again almost as soon as it was forced in. At one time the Captain and the Chief Engineer gravely discussed the possibility of flooding the two forward holds as a last desperate means of extinguishing the fire. If there had been no passengers on board they would have resorted to this expedient, but the risk was too great. The bow was already dipping and the flooding of the two holds might have caused the vessel to plunge bow foremost into the deep, carrying the five hundred passengers with her, with results too awful to contemplate. That was a fateful conference between these two officers, and one

can easily understand how racked they were with the tremendous responsibility thrust upon them by the circumstances of the hour. Flooding being ruled out, the Captain decided to launch the boats, and it was at this time that several of the emigrants jumped overboard in their terror and were drowned. When the order to lower boats was given, others of the emigrants, casting all ideas of discipline to the winds, attempted to get into the boats while they were still on the chocks; and it was only by the free use of sticks that they were driven off.

The story of the sea is full of big tragedies, but I can imagine nothing so horrible to the beholder as to watch a boat full of human beings, many of them women and children, being swung out and dropped upon the turbulent water, being turned turtle by some giant comber as easily as a child

will topple over a penny craft, sliding all her human cargo into the sea, and then righting herself again—empty. This is what happened to No. 2 boat, which was launched in charge of First Officer H. P. Miller. Twenty-two out of the twenty-four cabin passengers were assisted into this boat, and among the other occupants were the Chief Steward and Stewardess. So far as I can learn, the block of the aft tackle got caught on the gunwale of the boat, causing its bow to swing round to the sea. This led to the disaster. The Chief Officer, the Chief Steward and the Quartermaster—who a few minutes earlier had had such a marvellous escape from fire—and another person managed to get back into the boat. They cut the block away with a boat-axe, and the boat drifted astern and was never seen again.

No. 6 boat was next launched in



The first glimpse of the burning ship as the *Carmania* came up with her

charge of Fourth Officer Langyel. This was soon crowded with passengers and crew, and, apparently, got safely away. One can only guess what followed; in such a furious sea it must have been speedily engulfed.

No. 7 boat had an even more tragic fate. The Captain had doubts as to the wisdom of launching any other boats as the sea was so rough, but the occasion seemed desperate. Accordingly, the boat was filled and safely lowered. It made the water and floated, but in the great heaving ocean the *Volturno*, drifting where the waves carried her, rose high at the stern and came down upon the frail craft. The ship literally sat upon her, and the occupants met with a horrible death.

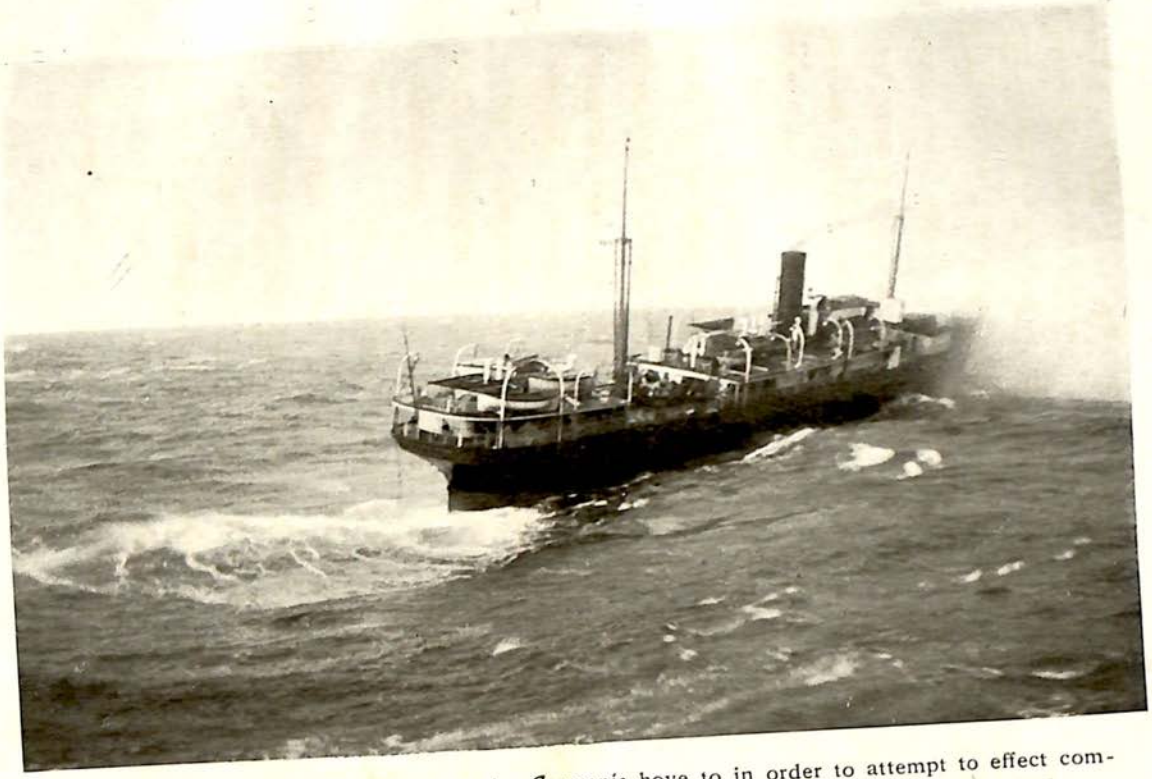
The Crushed Boat

At this juncture Captain Inch received word from the Marconi operator that the

Carmania was coming to their assistance. He immediately gave orders to the Second and Third Officers, whose boats had been stove-in while they were endeavouring to get them out, that no more boats were to be launched, and he went forward to continue fighting the fire.

Was There Panic?

What happened at this stage is a little difficult to determine. The Captain declares there was no panic, but, judging from the statement made by Walter Trentepohl, the German clerk who was picked up by the *Carmania*, there evidently was a great deal of confusion. People rushed about wildly, and, according to his statement, the crew, who were chiefly Dutch and Germans, seemed to think they ought to have first place, and, instead of quieting the passengers, they made the panic worse. The Captain was splendid, and remained on the forward



A picture of the *Volturno* taken when the *Carmania* hove to in order to attempt to effect communication. The propellers of the *Volturno* are seen to be right out of the water

deck, directing the operations for fighting the fire. Third Officer Dusselmann, in a statement which he made in New York, declared that the only trouble they had was when some of the stokers became excited and tried to rush the boats, whereupon the Captain drove them back with a pistol, telling them there was no danger if they would only stand by him and help him to try and save the ship. Other statements have been made declaring that the Captain had to use his revolver in order to put down the panic, but Captain Inch himself assures me his revolver never left the drawer in his room. It appears, however, that the Third Engineer drew his revolver on one of the stokers, who had refused to obey his orders to leave the boat-deck, and go below. I have no doubt this is the explanation of the revolver story. My own opinion, after carefully considering

all the evidence, is that there was a panic on the after-deck, but that as he was engaged forward Captain Inch did not see it.

After the Captain had given the order that no more boats were to be launched, some irresponsible persons tried to launch No. 10a boat. It was overcrowded, and, when an attempt was made to lower it, only the aft end went down, with the result that all the occupants were spilled into the sea.

The Toll of the Boats

It is believed about 120 people were killed or drowned in connection with the launching of the *Volturno's* boats. In the absence of official figures I cannot make any definite statement, but I am told that not more than one-third of those who got into the boats were women and children. If true, this shows there was a lack of discipline somewhere.

By good chance there was not more

How the *Volturno's* passengers were saved from suffocation is shown in this photograph, the smoke being carried to leeward by the gale

than half the usual number of emigrants on board the *Volturno* on this trip. On every voyage during the previous eighteen months she had carried at least 1,000 passengers, but, happily, this time her complement was only half that number. One's imagination reels at the thought of what would have happened had there been 1,000 instead of 500 emigrants, huddled together in the after part of the ship, with the fire gradually forcing its way from hold to hold.

After the awful fate of the boats a great many of the passengers believed that the end had come, and they became very hysterical. One woman, with a baby clasped to her breast, jumped over into the seething waters. A still more tragic case was that of a young French married couple who decided they could not endure the horror any longer. They placed their arms round each other, ex-

Tragedies of Despair

changed a farewell kiss, and jumped into the sea. Fortunately this madness did not spread.

When the *Carmania* came in sight the Captain ordered the Chief Engineer of the *Volturno* to stop the engines so as to save the coal for working the pumps and dynamos. The ship then fell in the trough of the sea, and lay in that position the whole time, the wind thus driving the flames to leeward.

Captain Barr, having learned by wireless of the tragic results of the attempts to launch the *Volturno's* boats, resolved to send one of the *Carmania's* life-boats to the burning vessel. Naturally, this boat was placed in charge of First Officer Gardner with a crew of picked men, whose names deserve to be recorded, as they played the part of undoubted heroes: James Donaghue, S. Smith, W. Turton, Michael Murray, T. Titchen, W. Donking, John Wise, H. Payne and G. O. Thompson.

The *Carmania's* boat being launched. First Officer Gardner, wearing his lifebelt, is standing near the rudder

The ninth man jumped in at the last moment, and, as he begged so hard to be allowed to stay, Mr. Gardner did not insist upon his going back.

The launching was a difficult operation, but it was smartly done, and a ringing cheer sent those gallant men on their way. Two or three oars were broken at the start, but these were replaced, and the men bent themselves to their task. Oil had been poured on to the sea, and for a short distance the water was fairly smooth, but soon they were lost to view, and it was only occasionally those on board the *Carmania* caught a glimpse of the boat, so terrific were the seas which it encountered I do not believe the boat would have lived had it not been for the wonderful effect of the little oil bag which hung from the weather bow. This bag was

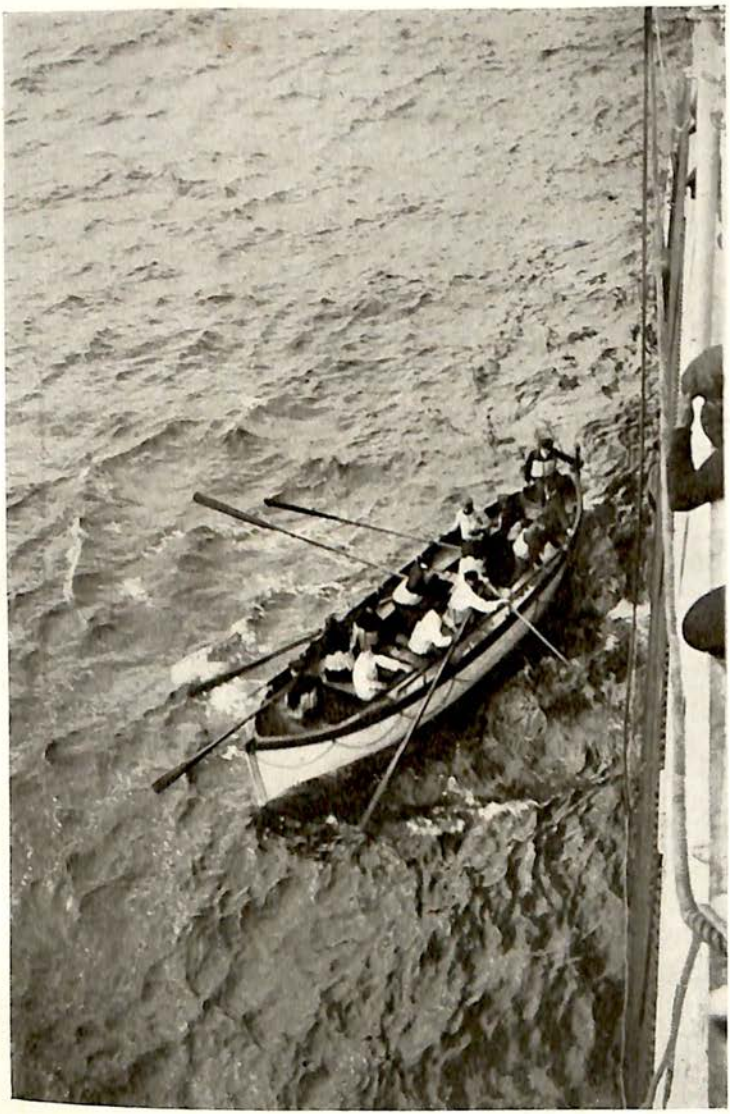
Launching the Carmania's Life-boat

filled with waste and fish oil, the latter falling drop by drop through small holes at the bottom of the bag; and these little drops of oil prevented the seas breaking over the boat's bows. The sea anchor was also of immense assistance, especially when seven oars out of ten were lost.

Heroic Failure

Unhappily the hopes the gallant crew entertained of being able to save some of the *Volturno* passengers were frustrated, for Mr. Gardner found it impossible to get anywhere near the burning ship. Huge waves were breaking against the vessel, and an attempt to get alongside meant certain death to his crew; so, regretfully, he had to turn back, and after two hours' battling with the angry sea, once more was within hail of the *Carmania*.

It was an amazing feat of skill to bring his boat back safely with only three oars.



The boat pushing off from the *Carmania* to go to the rescue

Further oars were thrown to him from the ship, but more than once it looked as if nothing could prevent the life-boat from being smashed against the *Carmania's* side. Captain Barr shouted in stentorian tones:

"Get the crew out and let the boat go."

Mr. Gardner made one more effort, and the boat was made fast. Three or four of the crew seized hold of the rope ladders that were in readiness for them, and they climbed aboard to safety. The others remained in the boat, which was hauled up to the boat deck, a number of the passengers assisting the crew in this operation.

A Modest Hero

A great cheer greeted Mr. Gardner and his men when the boat was raised to her davits and they jumped on to the deck. One lady passenger, evidently hailing from Lancashire, rushed forward, grasped him

warmly by the hand, and said, "God bless you, lad!" a salutation and benediction that greatly embarrassed Mr. Gardner. He at once proceeded to the bridge to report to the Captain, and resumed his ordinary duties as if he had just returned from a little rowing exercise, instead of having fought grimly with death on a tempestuous sea for over two hours.

A Daring Manœuvre

Having failed to reach the *Volturno* in this way, Captain Barr, by an act of splendid seamanship, manœuvred the *Carmania* quite close to the burning vessel. It was then seen that the forepart of the ship was deserted, the passengers and crew having all been driven aft by the awful heat. Signals of comfort and hope were waved to the awe-stricken passengers, some of whom fluttered a few handkerchiefs in return, but it was evident they were overwhelmed with the

The return of the *Carmania's* boat after two hours' battle with the elements in a vain effort to reach the *Volturno*. Extra oars were thrown to the boat from the *Carmania*

calamity which had befallen them. All were wearing life-belts, and hoping against hope that rescue might come, although the tragic fate which had overtaken the launching of their own boats had undoubtedly struck terror into their souls.

It was impossible to make communication, and the two vessels drifted apart, while those on board in each case watched and waited with bated breath.

Earlier in the day Captain Barr had sent out messages to all ships within call, and these were promptly responded to by the vessels whose names I have already given. The first to arrive after the *Carmania* was the *Seydlitz* at 3.30 in the afternoon, and later came the *Grösser Kurfürst*. At 6 o'clock the *Kroonland* hove in sight, followed at intervals by the *Minneapolis*, *La Touraine*, *Rappahannock*, *Devonian*, *Czar* and *Narragansett*, the

Coming of the Titans

last four arriving early on Friday morning. The *Asian* also arrived, but took no part in the rescue operations.

When the *Seydlitz* was getting close, Captain Inch suggested that the *Carmania* should go to look for the two boats that had got away. Captain Barr steamed twelve miles north-west and circled, but nothing was seen of the missing craft.

Later in the afternoon, Captain Barr made another effort to get into touch with the *Volturno*, as wireless messages had been received stating that the position was becoming more desperate. The suggestion has been made that if the *Carmania* had had a rocket apparatus on board communication might have been effected and rescues achieved. I particularly asked Captain Barr his opinion on this point. He told me he had rockets available, but if he had made

Helpless!

Mr. Francis Gardner, first officer of the *Carmania*, who went in charge of the boat put out from that liner

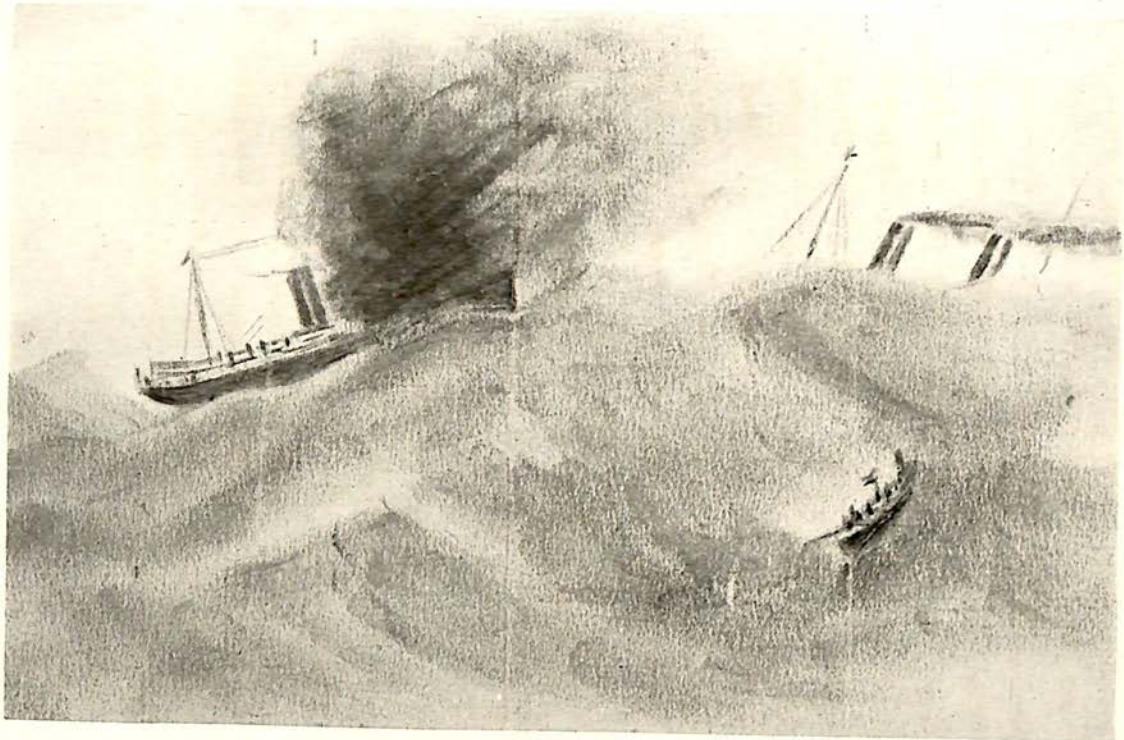
connection with the *Volturno* it would have been futile. The strongest hawser ever made, the stoutest chain ever forged, would have snapped like thread under such a terrific strain. I have assisted in working the apparatus in a shipwreck on the East Coast, and I know from experience how difficult it is to work the cradle even when the ropes are firmly fixed at one end. Captain Inch shares Captain Barr's opinion. "No rope," he said, "could be fixed from ship to ship, for nothing could stand the tug of two big ships pulling against each other as they swung upon the heaving waters."

The *Seydlitz* tried to reach the *Volturno* by one of her little boats, but she also was unsuccessful. The *Carmania* then dropped half a dozen life-rafts overboard, but the *Volturno* could not get up sufficient steam to pick them up. They all drifted across her bow. Further attempts

Hopeless!

at communication were tried. The *Volturno* put out a life-buoy and keg on a small line, but the ship was drifting so fast that they went to windward, and the *Carmania* could not get them. I have wondered a great many times what would have happened if the *Carmania* had picked up the life-buoy. My own view is that there was a misunderstanding somewhere, as both Captains knew very well that even if a line had been taken from one ship to the other it would not have been of any practical advantage, for the reasons I have given.

One will never forget the look of dire despair that settled on the faces of the passengers, huddled together in the after part of the ship, as effort after effort to save them resulted in failure. No longer did we wave signals of attempted comfort, for we knew that only a miracle could save them.



What the sea was really like. A pencil sketch drawn by G. O. Thompson, one of the crew who went to the rescue in the *Carmania's* boat. The *Volturno* is shown burning—the funnels are those of the *Carmania*

They must have felt as if they were inside a ring of spectators who had come to watch them fight to the death. The first desperation had passed. The cargo that was alight had burned so fiercely that it had commenced to burn itself out. All the brass work in the forecastle melted and disappeared. Even the glass in the portholes, half an inch in thickness, melted away as easily as silver paper held in the fire. Hour after hour those on the *Volturno* fought with the fire, but all the time it was winning against their puny efforts. Two of the seamen remained for twelve hours at a stretch at the hoses at the two hatches.

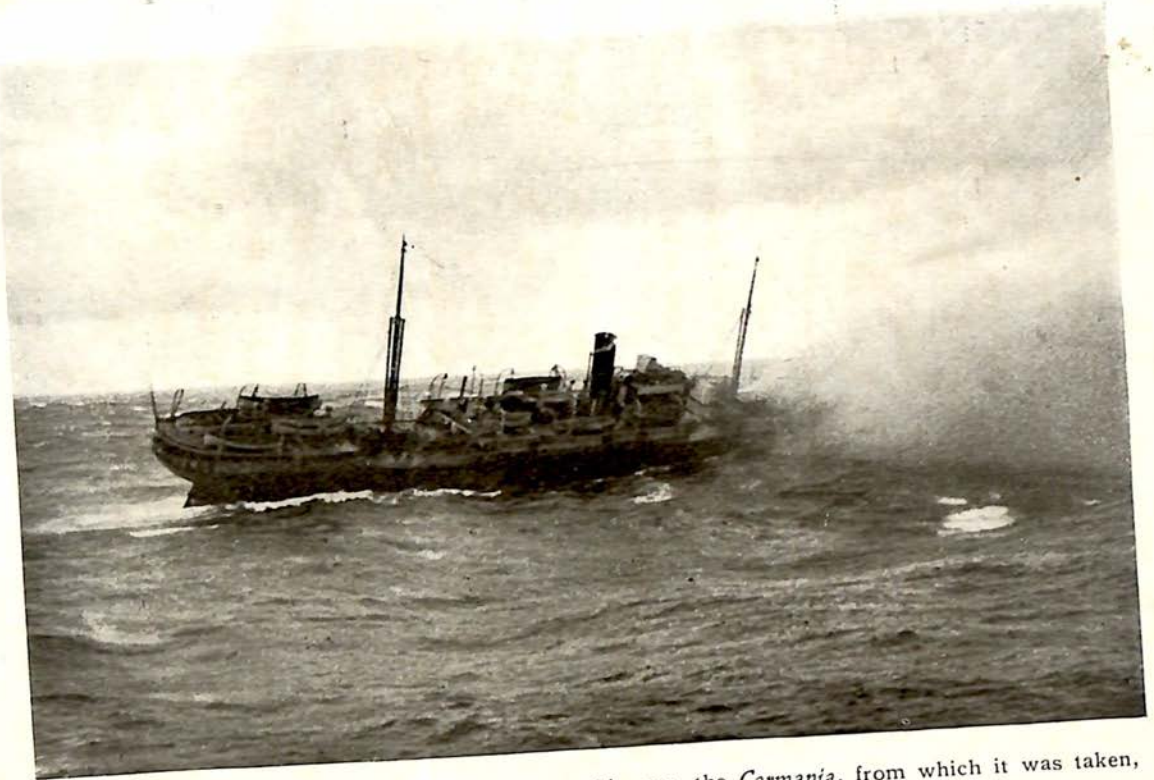
The Arena of Death

It was in the neighbourhood of the 'midship hospital that the conflagration was worst. A great deal of the woodwork had collapsed, and all that could be done with the hoses was futile.

The heat generated by flames confined in such a limited space was terrific. Steel girders became white hot, and Captain Inch told me how he pushed a hose as far as it would go so that the water should pour into the burning hatch. As he stood watching the water making but a poor fight against the fire, he saw the flames rise and melt the nozzle of the hose from which the torrent was rushing.

When the Light Failed

The fire kept bursting out afresh at the back of the men with the hose, and it was then that Captain Inch found in the saloon that these back fires were started by the electric wires short-circuiting. He pulled out the fuses, and darkness fell over the ship, save for the glare from the fire itself. That was the most anxious time of the whole disaster, so far as the Captain himself was concerned. Up on deck the great



No photograph was secured at closer range than this one, the *Carmania*, from which it was taken, endeavouring to get into position at the time

crowd of foreigners praying and crying; down below a raging inferno, with only a bulging steel barrier between the two.

Every moment of that long night the Captain was fearful lest the intense heat of the steel should ignite the strips of planking above. Had that happened, Heaven alone knows what the result would have been. That panic would have followed is certain, and then—chaos.

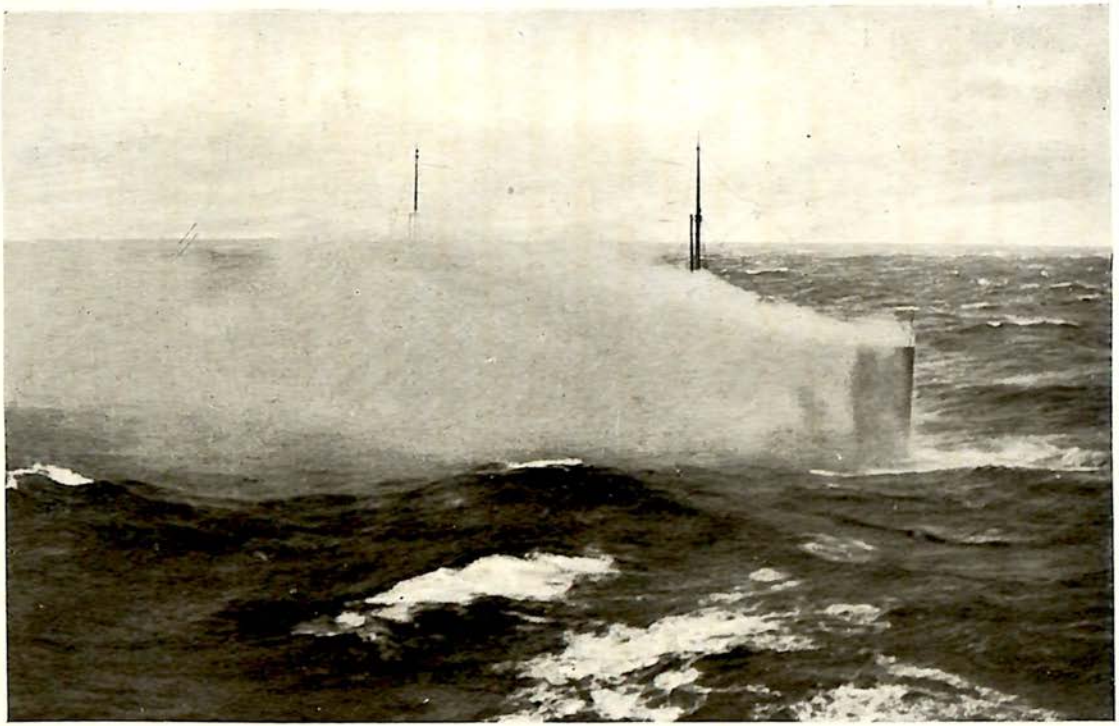
"The Feast of the Atonement"

The strangest part of the company on board was undoubtedly a group of Jews, mostly Russians, who were emigrating to New York. When the *Volturno* left Rotterdam the Feast of the Atonement was near, and therefore the Uranium Company obtained for the use of the Jewish passengers a sacred scroll and sacred horn, so that they could hold their celebrations during the voyage. I may add that the

scroll, which is written on parchment in Hebrew characters, was loaned to the Company for the voyage by the Rotterdam Synagogue at a cost of £50.

There was a Rabbi at the head of this band of Jews, who, coming from the interior, had most of them never seen the sea, or ships that go down to the sea. One can imagine their horror when, in the midst of a lonely ocean, they found that the ship which kept them afloat upon the water was furiously burning. They brought out their scroll, they sounded their horn, they knelt down together on the deck, and read the scroll, and recited their prayers many times during the day. During the night, when the moon had gone down, and all was dark excepting for the glare of the flames, they spent the long hours in repeating prayers and chanting psalms.

At 6.30 p.m., those on the *Carmania* saw



A photograph taken late in the afternoon of October 9th, when the smoke clouds were at their worst

that flames were occasionally breaking through the great clouds of smoke, and we received a despairing message that the upper plates would soon give way. Shortly after, in desperation, Captain Inch succeeded in lowering a boat, which he placed in charge of the Second Officer and four men. The falls of this boat had been cut in the morning for use when the *Carmania's* boat was trying to get alongside. They therefore could not lower the boat right to the water, but only half way down and then let it go. Happily, it remained upright. Apparently, several planks were started, as Mr. Lloyd, the Second Officer, reported she was leaking. Mr. Lloyd made a statement in New York that his object in taking out this boat was to show that small boats could live, although such a heavy sea was running. The success of his demonstration was not

A Message of Despair

apparent, for, although he managed to reach the *Grösser Kurfürst*, and his men were, by good fortune, saved, the boat was dashed to pieces.

The experience of a boat sent out later by the *Devonian* is yet another proof of how hazardous a thing it was to venture upon the raging sea. Captain Trant, of the *Devonian*, lowered a boat as soon as he came up with the *Volturno*, at about 12.30 midnight. This boat returned after a great battle with the sea—a battle worth while, for a man from the *Volturno* had been picked up. While the crew were being taken back on board the boat capsized, but by great good luck the men were saved, though the boat was lost.

The *Kroonland* made several attempts to get alongside the *Volturno* with a small boat, and once, when the boat was near, Captain Inch tried to induce some of his

Some idea of the turbulent state of the ocean may be gained from this photograph, which was taken while the *Carmania* was manœuvring round the burning vessel

passengers to jump from the weather side, but none would run the risk.

At 9.30 the sky was suddenly illumined with a lurid glare, and from the *Carmania* we could see that the flames were shooting up to a height of about seventy feet, exploding the magazine on the bridge and disabling the wireless. Before this happened the Captain sent his last wireless appeal for help. The final message received on the *Carmania* was "For God's sake send us some boats or do something." I modified this message somewhat when I sent it to England in the first instance, because I felt it was an unfair reflection on those who had been risking their lives for hours in trying to reach the *Volturno* by small boats. Captain Inch has since thanked me for having made the modification. I realised at the time that the message was the last despairing outburst of

The Last Message

an agonised man. If he had seen it in writing before it was aerographed I am sure he would have cast it in a different form, but during the whole of that twenty-four hours no written messages were received or dispatched. The Captain was too absorbed with other things to consider niceties of phraseology.

Whilst we on the *Carmania* were gazing at the awful spectacle of the flames shooting up to the masthead, a cry was heard coming over the tempestuous waters, "Help! Help!" The searchlight of the *Carmania*—the only ship on the scene possessing one—showed "a strong swimmer in his agony." A lusty cheer greeted him as he made his way towards the ship. It was a difficult task to get him aboard, and two of the crew, A. J. Heighway and W. Garvey, bravely went to his assistance. There was much cheering

A Gallant Rescue

Walter Trentepohl, who jumped overboard from the *Volturno,* and was picked up by the *Carmania* after an hour's struggle in the water

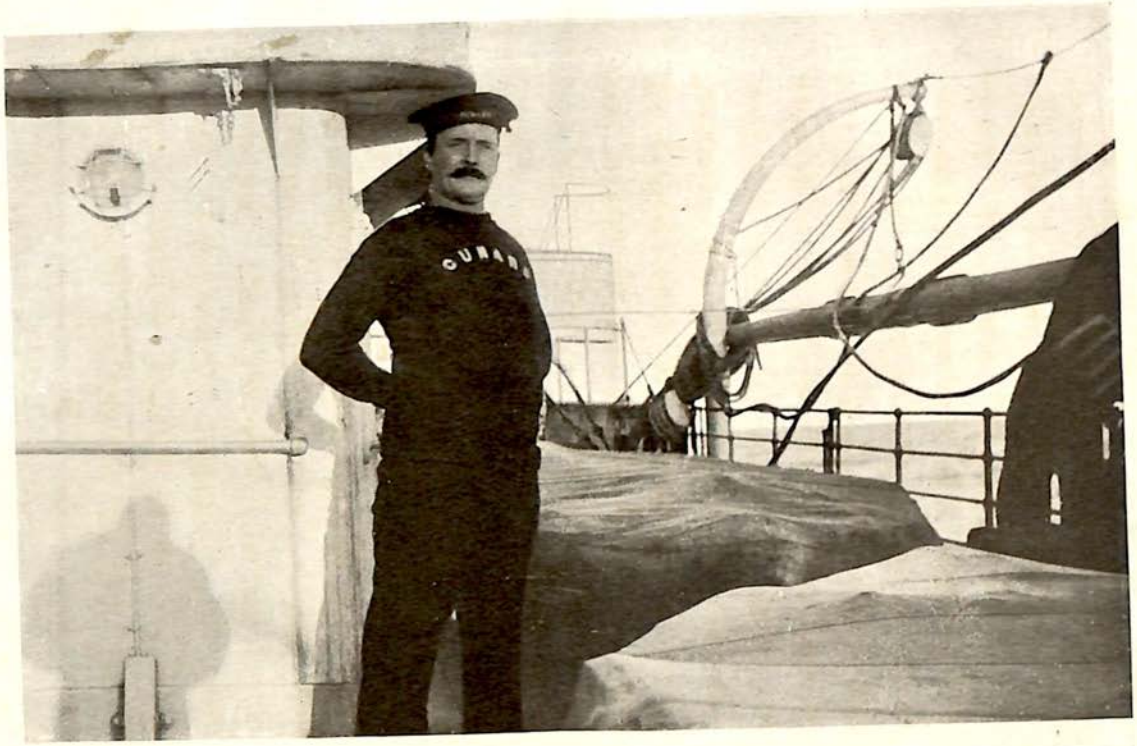
when he was saved after twenty minutes' anxious suspense. The man, who was a German clerk, named Walter Trentepohl, was in a state of utter exhaustion, and was at once taken into the ship's hospital and attended to by Dr. Mackenzie. It seems he jumped overboard with an English passenger and a member of the crew. He made for the German ship, but as they did not hear him he came towards the *Carmania*. He was about an hour in the water. Some of the passengers on the *Carmania* declare they saw one of the other men who jumped overboard with Trentepohl carried past the bow, the current being too strong for him. I do not know what became of the third man.

The Man who was Saved

When Trentepohl arrived on the *Carmania* he had in his pocket a chunk of bread, some tobacco and two candles. I was curious to know why he carried the last named,

as he could not very well light them when he was in the water. To use his own words, "The two candles which were found in my pocket I made use of for my work, to light up the dark corners in the steerage. The candles were supplied to us by the ship. Their use, therefore, was officially sanctioned." This is contradicted by Captain Inch, who assures me that naked lights were not allowed in any part of the *Volturno*.

After Trentepohl had been brought aboard the *Carmania*, the moon, which had been shining fitfully through the angry clouds, disappeared, but we were able to see what was happening by the *Volturno* fire. The night we spent will never be forgotten. There was little sleep on board, except the sleep of exhaustion. Men and women paced the decks through the weary hours. Some obtained snatches of sleep in the



Seaman Heighway, of the *Carmania,* who jumped into the sea and after a twenty minutes' struggle in the water brought Walter Trentepohl to the vessel

drawing-room or in the lounge. Some prayed for the souls in peril, and all were racked with heart-breaking anxiety.

"For Those at Sea"

On the previous Sunday morning, when Captain Barr, at Divine service, had read the "Prayer for the use of Sailors and Persons at Sea," how little we thought that the dangers of the ocean would be brought home to us in such a tragic manner! The words came back to us with tenfold emphasis: "Look down in mercy on us, Thine unworthy servants, who are called to see Thy wonders on the deep and to perform the duties of our vocation in the great waters. Let Thine everlasting arm be underneath and round about us. Preserve us in all dangers, support us in all trials, conduct us speedily and safely on our voyage, and bring us in peace and comfort to our desired haven."

These words returned to our minds again and again as, a short distance away, we saw the burning *Volturno* and her five hundred passengers on the verge of a holocaust. What appalled us more than anything else was our utter helplessness. Here were gathered together, thanks to the agency of the Marconigraph, the finest fleet of liners ever assembled in the middle of the ocean, all fitted with the regulation number of boats, but, owing to the fierce wind and furious seas, all absolutely powerless.

Soon after midnight the *Grösser Kurfürst* managed to lower a boat with a double crew, which, after battling with the waves for two or three hours, got within speaking distance of the *Volturno*. The boat, however, was forced to return, having had almost as trying an experience as the

Facing Danger

Carmania men had passed through earlier in the day.

The *Minneapolis* also put out a boat in charge of an officer and six men, and their experience was even more thrilling than that of the German crew. The boat got within hail, and the officer shouted to the affrighted passengers to jump. They either did not hear, owing to the roar of the gale, or they were hypnotised by terror, for nobody responded to the suggestion. The passengers were in a state of semi-collapse. This really is not to be wondered at. They had seen earlier in the day over a hundred of their fellow passengers carried away or engulfed in the maddened sea, when the first attempt was made to escape. They knew that the fire was gaining ground inch by inch. They had seen the *Carmania's* boat and other boats beaten back after heroic efforts to reach them. They had witnessed the

failure of all the subsequent efforts to effect communication with the Cunarder, and their hopes of salvation, which may have quickened for a moment as steamer after steamer came into view, had waned, until now they were in abject despair. They were also enduring great physical sufferings, being ceaselessly tossed to and fro by the angry sea. It seemed at times that all must be swept overboard, but they held on like grim death.

Mothers were there with babies in arms, and they could only weep. Many passengers partook of no food for twenty-four hours. These people were passing through the terrors and agonies of an inferno, which became more real as the night came on. The heat became more and more intense. Owing to the direction of the wind, the smoke, which belched forth from the hold

Agonies of Inferno

A helpless log on the water towards the close of the day

in black clouds, was drifting away from them, and they were, therefore, spared the excruciating pain of death by slow suffocation. Happily the flames did not spread abaft the funnel, but when the detonators and rockets in the chart-room exploded the terrified emigrants thought their end had come. Terror drove them almost mad.

Meanwhile a disaster threatened the boat's crew of the *Minneapolis*, who, in returning, were carried away by wind and current. At a critical moment a terrific sea broke the rudder, and the crew were at the mercy of the waves. Fortunately their plight was seen from the *Carmania* by the aid of the searchlight, and Captain Barr at once proceeded to their assistance. When the ship got alongside the men were in an utterly exhausted condition, and it was with

A Thrilling Incident

the greatest difficulty that they were rescued. The officer was just getting out when a big sea bore down upon the boat, and he was thrown into the water. Luckily a line was lowered from the *Carmania*, and he was able to catch it and so was hauled on board. The boat was smashed to pieces against the side of the ship. The men had been in the boat for five hours.

Captain Barr's Abnegation

I have been asked many times why Captain Barr did not put out boats when other steamships did so and thus share in the triumph of rescue. My answer has been that Captain Barr showed wonderful self-abnegation. He knew his ship, with her turbine engines, was very difficult to handle. So he took up a position from which he could use his searchlight to advantage. If it had not been for this searchlight, the crew of the *Minneapolis*

life-boat must have been lost when the rudder was carried away. Again, if the *Volturno* had broken up and the passengers had been obliged to jump into the sea, the *Carmania* was just where they could have been picked up. Captain Barr's good judgment in this respect was demonstrated by the saving of the German clerk Trentepohl. Captain Barr by his resourcefulness did more than anyone else to minimise the results of the disaster.

Taking the Risk

After the failure of the *Minneapolis* boat to reach the *Volturno* two or three other ships tried, and when the boats approached the burning ship Captain Inch arranged for the engineers and others to jump into the sea in order to induce the passengers to follow their example, in the hope of their being picked up by these boats. About seventy or eighty jumped

overboard, and of this number all were picked up except five or six, who were carried away. A Russian opera singer had a very trying experience. He did not need any persuasion to jump, but asked the Captain to give him his permission to go. "I want you to go," said Captain Inch, and over he went. The next Captain Inch saw of him was in New York. He had missed the boat, he told the Captain, and had clung on to a rope hanging from the ship's side. Dipping into the sea every now and then as the ship rolled in the intense darkness, he had sought for an hour and a quarter to climb back on deck. He succeeded in the end, but his legs and arms were frightfully burned, owing to slipping down the rope so many, many times. Tears ran down his face when he saw the Captain in New York. He grasped both his hands with pleasure,

and then commenced, somewhat unnecessarily, as the Captain thought, to kiss him!

Baby Rolls into the Sea

One woman, with her baby in her arms, overcome with fatigue, fell asleep against the rail. When she woke the baby was gone; it had rolled into the sea.

Several other curious things happened. One man, for instance, when told to take off his great Russian boots, did so, and calmly hung them round his neck. They were there when he was taken into one of the boats, and then, of course, were thrown away.

Another man—a Steerage Steward—went about all the day with both life-belt and life-buoy round his body. When he was told to jump he calmly took them both off, laid them on the deck, and went into the water without them—the very moment,

of course, when they might have been of inestimable value.

So occupied was Captain Inch with the work of endeavouring to hold back the progress of the flames on the one hand, and that of preventing confusion and panic among the passengers on the other, that he had no food from Wednesday night until Friday morning. And he admits that he felt no need of it. Occasionally during the worst hours of that memorable Thursday the Steward would bring him a cup of hot coffee, but the Captain sent him back with the coffee untasted. His sole sustenance, if it can be called such, was tobacco, and he smoked continuously from the moment he set to work to fight the flames until he left on the last boat for the *Kroonland*.

The Heroic Captain

During the long-drawn watches of that

awful night Captain Inch and the Chief Engineer, assisted by two or three seamen who remained with them, spent their time in improvising rafts, so that when the ship broke up, as they expected it would do at any moment, the passengers might be able to keep themselves afloat until perchance they were picked up by one of the boats cruising around. I cannot imagine greater courage than this. Captain Inch and the Chief Engineer knew that the fire was stealing its way aft, but they kept the grim secret to themselves, and while the flames roared forward, and the tempestuous sea lashed the sides of the vessel, they steadily went on making rafts.

Thus the night wore away. To the Captain's intense relief the fire did not get beyond the women's steerage on the starboard side, but the deck was becoming hotter and hotter, and he realised they could

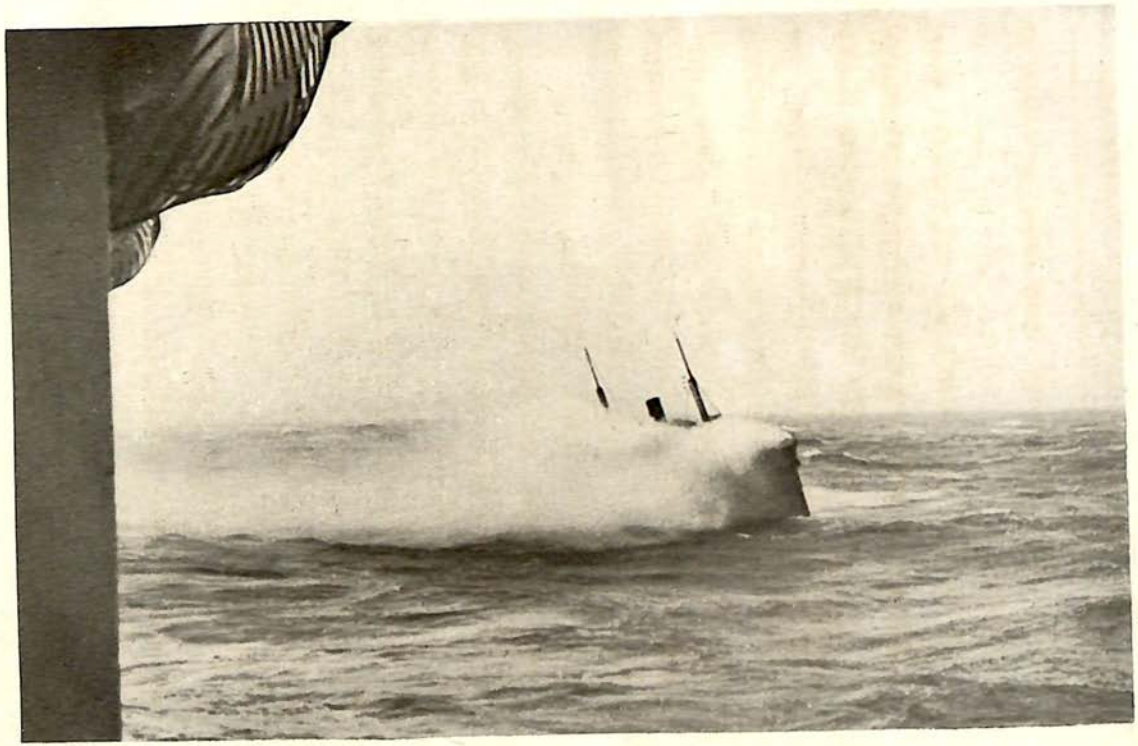
not possibly hold out more than an hour or so longer.

Coming of the Boats

Happily the wind and sea went down during the night, and at daylight the boats were able to get alongside. The first boat to arrive was one from the *Devonian.* Captain Inch stretched a rope across the deck and put the men on the weather side and the women and children on the lee side. The women, clinging to lines or rope ladders, dropped into the boats, while the children were lowered by heaving lines.

Stern Measures

There were several exciting incidents during the transfer of the children. A man threw his child overboard, and it hit the thwart of the boat. The father tried to follow, but the Captain knocked him down. He jumped to his feet, leapt over the rope,



The density of the smoke sometimes hid the *Volturno* completely

rushed to the side, eluding the Chief Engineer, who tried to stop him, and dropped into the boat, where he got a good hammering.

A second man, disguised in the great coat belonging to the Third Officer, was caught trying to push his way into a crowded boat; he also was promptly knocked down by the Captain, and he stayed on board till the last.

One of the women threw her child overboard in the hope of its falling into the *Devonian's* boat. It fell with a splash between the ship and the boat, and but for a plucky *Devonian* man, named Hazelwood, must have been crushed to death. Hazelwood did not hesitate a moment; almost as the child hit the water he dived in after it, and got it into the boat. "It was the quickest thing I ever saw," says Captain Inch, to whose arm the frantic mother clung, scream-

ing with terror, until she saw her child so nobly rescued.

Then came the turn of the men.

As there was no possibility of sorting out the passengers into families in the work of rescue, it came about that there were many separations. Fathers, mothers and children found themselves on different ships bound for different ports, and many suffered days of distress and agony, as they did not know whether their loved ones were saved. Ultimately I believe all the members of the rescued families were brought together again—a happy result due largely to the admirable organisation of the Uranium Steamship Company, backed up by the charitable societies in the various ports where the rescued were landed. In two cases at least brides were separated from their prospective husbands, but they discovered one another's

Separations

whereabouts, and the marriages took place in New York within a month of their separation in mid-ocean.

The arrival of the tank steamer *Narragansett* full of oil was most timely. Seventeen hours previously Captain Barr had sent out a general message inquiring whether a tank steamer was in the radius. The Captain of the *Narragansett* replied that he would arrive at six o'clock, and he did. He at once pumped huge quantities of oil round the burning vessel, literally pouring oil upon the troubled waters. The effect was marvellous, for a breaking sea was turned into a swell, and thus the progress of the small boats was facilitated.

Oil Upon the Waters

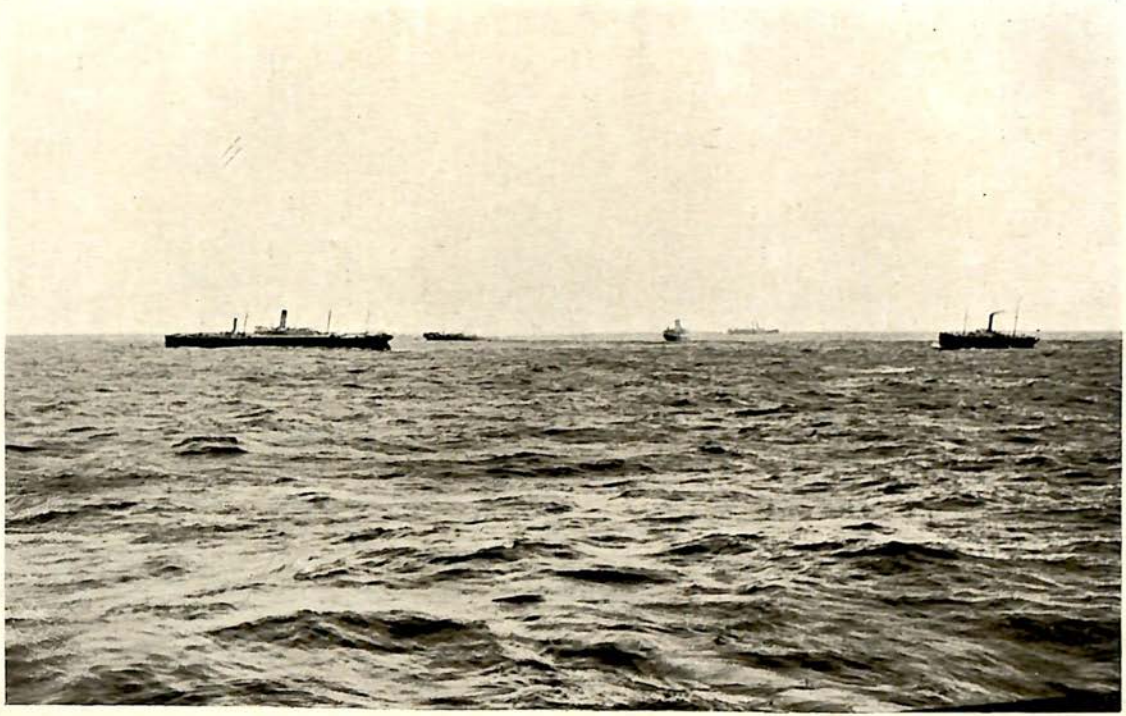
It was a stirring spectacle to see the assembled vessels putting off their boats as soon as day broke, and when the work of rescue was completed the Captains of the

steamers reported to the *Carmania* the following numbers saved:—

Grösser Kurfürst ...	105
Czar	102
Kroonland	90
Devonian	59
Seydlitz	46
La Touraine	40
Minneapolis	30
Narragansett	29
Rappahannock ...	19

The total death roll was one hundred and thirty-six.

Those saved by the *Kroonland* included the Captain, Chief Engineer and the two Marconi operators. The Captain lowered himself into the *Kroonland's* boat at 8 o'clock, exactly twenty-five hours after he had sent out the signal S O S, and after passing through the most trying ordeal to which a human being can be subjected.



The assembled fleet. From left to right may been seen the *Asian* with the *Devonian* in the foreground, the *Volturno* burning, the *Grösser Kurfürst*, the *Kroonland* in the distance, and the *Rappahannock*. Photograph taken from the *Carmania*

He took a last look round before he left the ship. He tells me that the entire deck was an irregular—a mad —switchback; for all the world as though it were rubber and mammoth fingers had poked upwards from below. The sides of the ship, too, were just as bad—her plates open and bent, not a regular foot all the way down to the hissing water-line.

Last to Leave

There was a moment during the night when the concentrated power of the imprisoned flames broke loose and met him full in the face. He looked down to No. 1 hold. By that time it was a mass of twisted girders and charred and splintered woodwork. It was a cauldron of leaping flames, and up through it came a stifling draught of hot air which sent him reeling backwards. An awful pain shot into his eyes. What really had happened was that

the film over the eyeballs had been dried up. He was blind for four days on the *Kroonland*, and suffered intense agony.

Another remarkable fact has been recorded by Captain Inch. A yellow-funnelled ship, he says, watched the spectacle, but what ship it was, and for what port she was bound, has never been discovered. She came up late in the afternoon, and lay some distance away from the other waiting vessels. As night dropped down she burned coloured lights, which it is supposed were to guide the boat she was launching. Having no wireless, she could not speak, and had probably been drawn to the spot by the reflection in the sky. On board the *Volturno* they named her the *Vulture* because she was waiting, and for want of knowledge of her real name

The "Vulture"

she has remained the *Vulture* to this day.

It is needless to say there was great rejoicing on the *Carmania* when news of the rescues became known, and the night of sorrow was turned into a morning of gladness. Before the assembled boats were dismissed, Captain Barr was warmly congratulated by the other Commanders on the part he had played in this wonderful drama of the sea.

"Heroes of the Nations"

One cannot pay too high a tribute to the heroism of those who manned the various ships assembled, without distinction of race, for no one crew displayed greater pluck than another. Here were assembled the ships of many nations, of Great Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Russia, but the call for courage appealed as strongly to the men of each, and was as bravely

answered. Assuredly here was proof that in hours of great stress nationality does not count. Lord Desart, the Wreck Commissioner, paid a well-deserved tribute at the Board of Trade Inquiry to the bravery of the crews of the rescuing liners, and this too has been finely expressed by the Press of both hemispheres.

On Sunday afternoon, October 12th, a general assembly of first-class passengers was held on the *Carmania* with Sir H. Evan M. James, K.C.I.E., in the chair.

The following resolutions were carried unanimously:

> "The saloon passengers of the R.M.S. *Carmania*, in a general meeting, desire to record their high appreciation and admiration of the promptitude, courage, and seamanship displayed by the Captains, Officers and Crews of the assem-

bled steamers in their successful efforts to save the surviving crew and passengers of the SS. *Volturno* on Thursday and Friday, October 9th and 10th, 1913, and they further desire that a copy of this resolution, signed by the Chairman, be sent to the Captain of each ship present on this occasion, and to the Captain of the *Volturno*, together with an expression of their deep sympathy with him and the Officers, Crew and Passengers.

"That the Chairman be requested to convey to Captain Barr an expression of their admiration of his prompt and energetic action in connection with the *Volturno* rescue operations.

"That a subscription be opened to recognise materially the efforts of the crew of the boat which went out in a high sea to endeavour to communicate

with the SS. *Volturno*, a share thereof to be handed over to Sailors Heighway and Garvey in recognition of their individual acts of courage, and that out of the fund a suitable presentation be made to Mr. F. Gardner, the First Officer, who was in charge of the boat.

"That the following committee be formed to carry out the resolutions already adopted, with such consequential additions as may be deemed necessary and proper: Sir H. Evan M. James, K.C.I.E.; Sir Arthur Eliott, Bart.; Mr. Mayson M. Beeton; Mr. Arthur Spurgeon, J.P.; Hon. Mr. Norman McLeod; Mr. A. S. Watt; Mr. Charles F. Hart; and Mr. Thomas K. Laidlaw."

At the dinner table on Sunday evening the sum of £101 10s. 6d. was collected,

which was subsequently brought up to £110 10s. 6d.

A gold watch was purchased and presented to First Officer Gardner, and the balance of the money was divided amongst the members of the crew concerned.

The watch bore the following inscription:—

THE BURNING OF THE
SS. "VOLTURNO."
Presented to
MR. FRANCIS GARDNER,
First Officer of the R.M.S. *Carmania*,
by the Saloon Passengers,
in recognition of his gallant work,
October 9th, 1913.

Practically all the Managing-Agents of the Companies have acknowledged the receipt of the Resolutions, and letters have also been received from most of the Captains expressing their appreciation.

When the passengers and crew had left the burning vessel, and the waiting ships had dispersed to their various ports, leaving the ill-fated *Volturno* to the mercy of the sea, the end had not yet come.

The Derelict

Before Captain Inch left the *Volturno* he tried to sink her by opening the sea valves, but this was impossible, as he was unable to get anywhere near the engine-room. So, for eight days the charred derelict was driven hither and thither by the sea—a danger on the ocean paths. A British cruiser was sent out to remove this menace to shipping, but was unable to locate the *Volturno*.

On October 17th, however, she was sighted by the *Charlois*, a Dutch oil steamer (Captain Schmidt) bound from Port Sabine, Texas. Captain Schmidt, who was ignorant of the great catastrophe of the

9th, came up with the *Volturno* at night, and in the darkness flames could be seen issuing from the forecastle and stern. Not knowing the extent of the tragedy, and thinking there might perhaps be some survivors aboard the derelict, at 10.45 p.m. Captain Schmidt lowered a boat in charge of his First Officer to hover near the *Volturno* during the night watches. No voice came through the darkness in answer to the hailing of the boat's crew; a grim, foreboding silence met them.

The Finding of the Hulk

Then came the dawn, and with it the opportunity to board the smoke-blackened, charred derelict. It needed no practised eye to see what had happened and how intense had been the heat! Every scrap of wood in the ship had been burned. The after decks had all fallen through, and little heaps of melted

The Scene of Tragedy

metal representing the buoyancy tanks were all that remained of the *Volturno's* boats.

Search of the vessel proving futile, the last act in the drama of the *Volturno* was played: the sea-cocks and outer circulation tubes were opened, the water poured in, and the vessel began to sink slowly beneath the waters through which she had hitherto so proudly forged her way.

The End

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